

Module 11 Lesson 4

Transcript

Today, I'm so excited to talk to you about one of my favorite things, produce. Specifically, produce that is local and in season. What I really want to focus on besides making all of our mouths water talking about delicious fruits and veggies, is the importance of buying local and in season and why it's worth it to spend a little more to head to the farmer's market instead of the grocery store or to start your own backyard garden.

Now, the point here isn't that you can never eat bananas again because they don't grow in a 15 mile radius of your home. It doesn't have to be all or nothing with choosing local and in season like most things we talk about. Yes, sometimes your broccoli is going to have traveled across the country to make it into your stir fry that night and that is okay but when you spot broccoli in your city's farmer's market, there's your chance to support a local farmer and there's also a better chance it's fresher and the nutrients are more abundant. As often as you can is my motto with local and in season.

What I'm going to discuss today is the following: the definition of local and in season, why choosing local foods can benefit both you and your community and tips that you could share with your clients for making eating local a little bit easier.

I think we all have some version or many versions of great memories of eating local and seasonal produce. I have great memories of driving up to Maine in the summer when I went to camp there and stopping with my family on the side of the road to buy blueberries from a drive-up farm stand. We devoured them in the car in about 60 seconds and they were sweeter than we'd ever had at any grocery store. We actually stopped at almost every stand we saw in a few hour drive and ate ourselves sick on amazing blueberries. Take a minute to think about your local and seasonal memories, I bet you have at least one.

One friend of mine can't wait until every early spring in New York when the farmer's markets carry garlic scapes, which have such a tiny growing season that they're only available a couple of weeks a year. She spends two weeks eating them with every single meal. I have a client who literally made my mouth water when she talked about picking tomatoes from her garden and eating them still warm from the sun with a little olive oil and fresh basil. Think about your memories. I'm sure they inspire your work but what does local and seasonal actually mean?

When it comes to produce, local doesn't have an exact definition actually. Some will argue that 100 miles or less is local, whereas others say the state line is local and even others may include distances up to a couple hundred miles. You may also hear terms like locally sourced and regional to define local food. Knowing that there isn't a true definition, you can make a decision for yourself as to what local means to you and what it matters to you too.

I consider most things that come to nearby farmer's market to be local. In the grocery store, I'm happy to buy things that are in the Northeast and consider those to be localish too or at least it's better for me to buy apples from New York State than from Washington State since I consider New York produce to be local. Local foods are fresher. They're picked or harvested, packaged and transported usually shorter distances by trucks which are more environmentally friendly than airplanes and ready to buy sometimes in the same day.

We know that most produce loses nutritional value in an accelerated way from the time it's harvested. So there's some truth to the theory that frozen vegetables and fruits can actually be as nutrient rich as fresh because most frozen fruits are flash frozen at peak ripeness. That's a whole other story, but there's truth there so by the way, veggies and fruits that are frozen are also great options for you. Local foods are also more environmentally friendly because as I said, they require less transportation and make smaller carbon footprints. They're going to require less refrigerated storage, less packaging, and less natural resources to get to where it is that you buy them.

There are so many other reasons to buy local: it helps to keep money in your immediate economy and community, you get more flavorful foods, they're safer foods because they haven't been touched by so many hands and steps of getting from farm to you, you can get a better sense of how the foods were grown if there's a farmer around to tell you about them, like at a farmer's market and local foods are seasonal foods, which is what I'm going to speak to next.

Seasonal foods are foods that are harvested during the current season you're in. Apples are in season in the fall we know. You'll find peaches in the summer and salad greens are the first harvest of spring. Seasonal foods used to be really straight forward because we weren't as sophisticated with transportation and storage so people ate what was grown nearby at the time. Then we got all fancy.

Now we can find watermelon in the supermarket all year long. You can find fresh cranberries in July and mangoes in January. We have both the technology and the demand for unseasonal foods all year long and eating seasonally became a thing of the past unfortunately, but even though we can eat anything we want without regard to seasonal eating, I still encourage

everyone to eat seasonally as much as possible. It's healthier for our bodies because the food is fresher and it's better for the environment because seasonal foods require less transportation and storage, so eating seasonally often translates into eating locally. Eating seasonally essentially connects us to nature and puts money in the pockets of local farmers.

The drawback to eating seasonally is absolutely that the winter produce tends to be a little less exciting when you've been eating potatoes, cabbages, onions, apples and pears for a few months, you may get a little bit bored but here's where I really recommend using foods that have been frozen or preserved to accent your meals and snacks.

Finally, here are a few of my favorite tips to help you eat locally and seasonally. Check out the circulars. When you look at the circulars for your supermarkets and when you walk into the market itself, usually the local and seasonal foods are going to be in the forefront of the produce section. They'll be less expensive than they are at other times of the year and you should absolutely load up on them and enjoy them at the right time.

Some things like green beans and lettuce greens grow in many seasons and many things do very well in greenhouses so you'll see them often, not just in one season. Choose seasonally, seasonal food is fresher and more loaded with nutrition than produce that has been stored or processed. The longer your fruits and veggies spend between harvest and your mouth, the more nutrients are lost. I always like to remind clients of that because that's also a reason that they taste better when they're local and seasonal. A watermelon on New Year's isn't going to taste as delicious as it does at your picnic in August, so plan menus that highlight what's in season, when it's in season. Think about it. A Thanksgiving feast in May is just as not as amazing as it is in November.

Mixing up your menus and plans with what's available and freshest always help to conjure the blueberries in the car feeling for me. Make a trip to the farmer's market. I really recommend a weekly trip to your local farmer's market, even if it's to buy a loaf of fresh bread. You're not only getting local seasonal foods that are good for you but you're putting your money directly into the hands of your growers. There are no middlemen and you're supporting the families directly. There's a lot of good and power in that.

You can also ask about pesticides and chemical fertilizers that are used and you can get recipe ideas and you can learn about what they're growing and what might be there the next week. Consider joining a CSA. If we have real diehard local and seasonal eaters on our hands, I always suggest a CSA, which stands for community supported agriculture. With a CSA, you give a farmer a

payment upfront and usually \$200 to \$300 for the growing season and if you're wondering, well, where's this farmer that you're going to pay your 200 to \$300 to, you can go online and check it out. The USDA actually has a great list of CSAs throughout the entire country.

In New York, we give our farmers our payment by April at the latest, starting in May, once a week the farmer meets you at an assigned spot, it could be a church or a community center of some sort. Some actually even deliver to your door. They bring what they've harvested that week and set up for a few hours. You drop in and pick up your share, which consists of whatever was grown. What you get may be a total surprise but most CSA farmers let you know what to expect a week to a few days before pickups so you can do a little planning, but the surprise is also some of the fun of it. You get some different vegetables that week and you got to try to make a new dish.

The season lasts from May through November and your money goes to the bounty and to the loss. This year in New York, we got tons and tons of tomatoes and we got very few zucchini. It happens, every year going to be a little bit different. For many people it's as much about the community and friends you see once a week when you pick up your produce as it is about the amazing, delicious produce and nutrients are getting from them.

Let's take a minute to review some key points: there's no exact definition of local, some consider it within a hundred miles, some within the state and some within a general region. A good rule of thumb is the closer to home, the fresher the produce. Seasonal foods are foods that are harvested during the current season you're in. Local seasonal foods tend to be more nutritious and better for the environment and you can help your clients get more local seasonal foods onto their plates by encouraging them to shop at farmer's markets, providing recipes that incorporate seasonal foods and recommending a CSA. Helping them find local seasonal foods in the regular grocery stores is also something you can do if going to a farmer's market is out of their wheelhouse and make a plan to free seasonal foods to use all year long. I'll see you in the next lesson.